



## **CUPE BC 2022 CONVENTION POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT**

Decisions by and actions of all levels of government impact our lives. Government policies have an impact on our families, our workplaces, and our communities. In a democracy, our power lies in the ability to have our say in relation to government decisions. We do this by having a say on who forms government, holding them accountable as they govern, and ensuring our voices are heard when decisions are made that impact the interests of working people.

Political action is fundamental to the work of our union. CUPE BC, in partnership with CUPE Locals and our National Union, advocates for fairness and equality, workplace rights, and better public services for our communities, our families, and ourselves. With over 100,000 members across BC, we have a critical mass of voters we can mobilize to effect political change.

Our committee works to engage CUPE BC members in political action, including electoral politics. We strive to elect and support progressive representatives who care as much as we do for our communities and the critical public services our members deliver.

### **“Level Up” Members in Political Action**

Many members do not view themselves as inherently political. Despite this, many take actions throughout their lives that are deeply political, like purchasing local or Canadian-made products, sharing a Facebook post on a community issue or event, or participating in conversations about current affairs. All of these small activities can be political and impact their wider communities. People are inspired to act when they care about a cause, and they step up to share information with their neighbours, volunteer

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their free time, or attend an event that brings awareness to an issue. Across our communities, people are taking small steps on issues they care about. The more they learn and share, the more active they become.

Likewise, members do not just wake up one day and spontaneously decide to run for public office. Nor do they generally decide, with no prior engagement, to take time off work or sacrifice time with family to volunteer on election campaigns. Spending evenings and weekends door knocking, calling, fundraising, and entering data is something activists typically work up to over months or even years. The decision to run for office usually takes place after years of engagement, following a whole host of experiences that build up skills, confidence, and knowledge.

So where does activism begin? It is different for everyone, but one great way for union members to embark on the road of activism is member-to-member outreach during an election campaign. Telephoning or knocking on the doors of people who you do not personally know can be intimidating for those who have never undertaken direct political action. Starting out with calls to fellow CUPE members can be far less daunting of a task because it begins with the common ground that we all share, and every interaction builds on that relationship. Gaining confidence through “low risk” activities will help members to feel ready for more political actions during an election.

Our committee encourages you to identify members in your Local who may be interested in opportunities to hone their political engagement skills, and to work on identifying ways to get them involved now. For those already active, encourage them to pursue more challenging tasks and take their experience and engagement to the next level. Many activists will climb the ladder of engagement on their own, but for others, it may take the encouragement of experienced leaders to light the spark that moves people from volunteering into direct engagement with electing progressive candidates.

When encouraging members to get involved with the intention of “levelling up” their political action, it is crucial to provide purpose, encouragement, and positive feedback;

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to remind volunteers how their contribution impacts the goal; to match tasks to interests; and ensure the skills and abilities of a task align to those of the volunteer. Above all, it is important to ensure that the volunteer experience is positive. When many members contribute time and work together, a greater impact can be achieved and those participating will share in the inherent reward and sense of accomplishment for their part in the victory. Thanking members for their contribution and recognizing the sacrifice of time away from family, friends, or other commitments, goes a long way towards furthering member engagement in political action.

For example, CUPE Locals can make a difference for working families in their communities by lobbying city councils and boards to become living wage employers, ensuring families can afford to live and work in our cities, and creating strong and sustainable neighbourhoods. By making a commitment to pay employees a living wage and enacting policies that ensure contractors also pay living wages, local governments become community champions, causing a positive ripple effect through the local economy, and bettering the lives and circumstances of workers and their families. More information can be found at [LIVINGWAGEFORFAMILIES.CA](https://www.livingwageforfamilies.ca).

Building on previous work, and in consideration of the resolution passed at the 2021 convention on reestablishing the zone coordinator system, our committee spent considerable time envisioning possible options for a framework for coordinated political activism across our membership in BC. Such a model might centre around geographic regions, each nested in the five areas represented by our District Councils. The goal of such a framework is to connect members with varying degrees of involvement on issues of shared concern, including elections, for greater coordination in our political activism and engagement. Such a model would allow CUPE BC to tap into our greatest strength—our membership—to mobilize, to be heard, and to have influence on critical issues. We will continue building this concept to increase our effectiveness and coordination in our efforts as a union.

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## **Strong Communities**

Strong relationships with local governments and school board representatives are crucial when engaging in local political action. While day-to-day labour relations and building productive labour-management relationships take significant time and energy, it is important to also engage with our local employers and monitor their decision-making by attending council/board meetings (or regularly reviewing minutes) to track their priorities and challenges in real time. Meetings with mayor and council or the board chair and trustees also provide opportunities for input to supplement advocacy in labour management meetings. Tactics like filling the room with members and supporters for a meeting where an important vote is taking place can have a big impact. Participation in budget consultations or presentations at a public meeting are vital to having our voices heard when decisions and direction-setting occur. These opportunities also demonstrate the strength of the local and the support of the workforce on key issues that employers are forced to address in the context of budget and priority-setting.

## **2022 Local Elections and Engagement in Future By-Elections**

Changes to election rules around donations and advertising means we must shift tactics away from funding campaigns and public outreach, and instead focus on direct member-to-member engagement. It is crucial that we mobilize our membership to vote for progressive candidates endorsed by CUPE, particularly in local elections where local governments are our direct employers. We have been working closely with our Local Government Liaison on our election engagement strategy to ensure effectiveness while complying with new rules. Volunteer efforts of CUPE members to identify and support the election of progressive candidates, including phoning and knocking on doors of our members and throughout communities, provides a real opportunity to mobilize our membership and could very well make the difference in the next election.

Considering the frequency of by-elections and their unpredictable scheduling, local government campaigns can pose a challenge for organizing and engagement. To

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successfully support progressive candidates, notice of the vacancy is needed prior to the official call of the by-election posted by Elections BC. Over the past year, work has been done within CUPE BC to compile information for Locals about early identification of potential vacancies; identifying potential candidates that we might endorse in advance of a vacancy; ensuring engagement in the endorsement process; and ways to quickly and efficiently reach members to support endorsed candidates leading up to the by-election. The tactics and strategy employed during the 2022 general municipal elections will provide an opportunity to assess options that may work well in the context of a by-election. As we move into 2023, the goal of the committee is to have a comprehensive by-election handbook with ready-to-use tactics that can be mobilized quickly when by-elections are called.

### **Provincial Government**

As we continued to move through the global COVID-19 pandemic over the last year, the BC Provincial Government faced a number of additional, concurrent crises, namely the opioid overdose crisis and multiple climate emergencies of 2021, including the heat dome resulting in numerous preventable deaths, forest fires causing widespread damage and loss, and flooding resulting in unprecedented, significant damage. Global pressures and conflicts, combined with an increased cost of living and workforce shortages, exposed gaps in critical services and supports needed to build strong, resilient communities. In the face of these and other challenges, the Provincial Government has committed to increasing support for climate resilience, mental health and addictions, jobs and skills training, quality childcare, and reconciliation with First Nations, while striving to ensure no one is left behind as we work toward post-pandemic recovery.

In 2021, the BC Provincial Government introduced several pieces of legislation to benefit workers in BC, including the implementation of a minimum five days of employer-paid sick leave for eligible workers. This was a welcome change for which CUPE and our allies lobbied, though it fell short of the ten legislated paid sick days the

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labour movement had collectively sought. We continue to engage with government, along with other unions, to ensure that all unionized workers in BC have access to a minimum of five days regardless of other entitlements for bargaining unit members in individual collective agreements. Legislation was also put forward this Spring to strengthen skills trade apprenticeships and to further regulate WorkSafeBC protections around asbestos exposure.

The Provincial Government has committed to improving access and affordability for childcare, and CUPE's efforts focus on ensuring that this new core public service is delivered publicly, universally available, and meets the unique needs of families and children. Our committee also prioritized CUPE's campaign for universally available, publicly delivered childcare over the past year, supporting and amplifying the work of CUPE Locals and of our Union in this area.

### **2021 Federal Election**

Although the next federal election was not scheduled to occur until 2023, the Prime Minister approached the Governor General on August 15, 2021 seeking dissolution of Parliament and the issuance of a writ for a general election. A "snap election" was called for September 20, 2021, less than two years since the last vote. The main objective of CUPE's campaign in BC was organized around two central components: first, mobilize CUPE members to volunteer with New Democrat campaigns in their area; and second, get CUPE members to the polls to vote (for New Democrat candidates) in the election. CUPE succeeded on both counts. Twenty-five canvas events were held in seventeen key ridings during the election period, which included participation in CLC-organized labour canvasses. CUPE activists were active in a number of campaigns, including three CUPE members running as candidates. Using Peer-to-Peer texting, messages went out to members in key ridings to encourage voting and provide voting information. In addition, a campaign postcard was sent to all members across the province, promoting the New Democrats as the best choice for working people.

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The national results overshadowed the results in BC, which saw an improvement in NDP support over the 2019 election. In 2021, the New Democrats won two more seats in BC than they had in 2019, taking the target ridings of Port Moody-Coquitlam and Nanaimo-Ladysmith—both key targets of the CUPE campaign work.

### **In Closing**

Our committee continues to lead in the area of political action, both internally, within our union, and externally, in our collaboration with unions via the CLC, the BC Federation of Labour, and District Labour Councils.

We are stronger and more successful when we work together to achieve change. To this end, we continue to highlight the importance of up-to-date contact information for all of our members. This information is vital to our ability to mobilize and engage in relation to political action. We also encourage CUPE Locals to affiliate with the respective CLC labour council in your area, and we encourage you, as leaders within our Union, to participate in the political process by joining and supporting the NDP and by volunteering your time on election campaigns.

There is much hard work ahead, but if we work together to engage our members in political education and political action, we can improve the conditions within our workplaces, our communities, and our society.

Respectfully submitted:

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